

Cahir Castle

Co. Tipperary



Dúchas The Heritage Service



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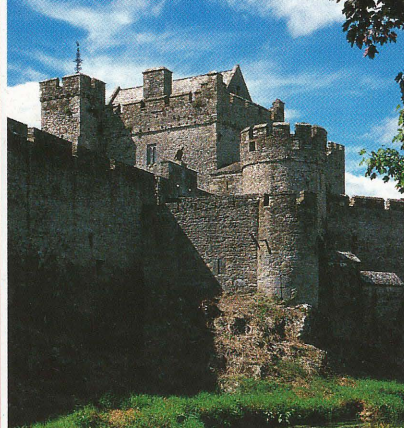
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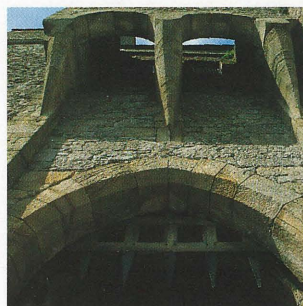
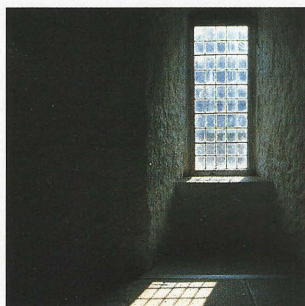
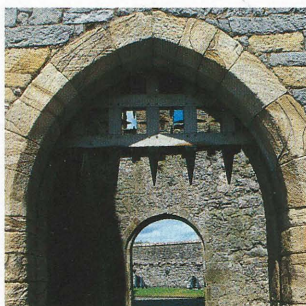
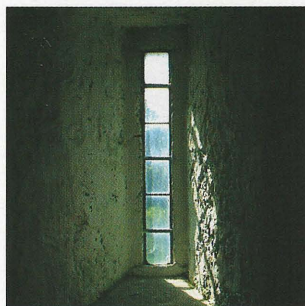
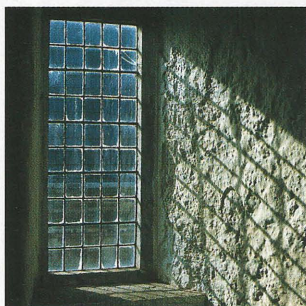
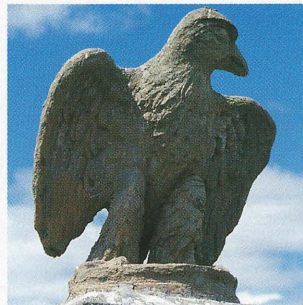


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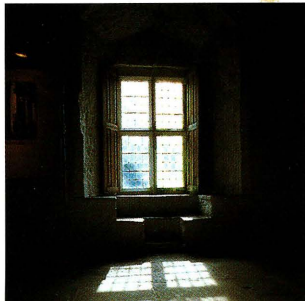
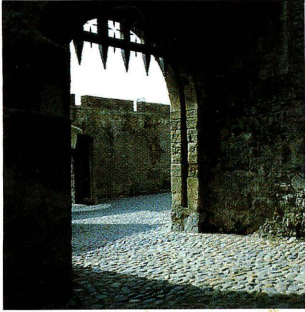
An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta, Gaeltachta agus Oileán
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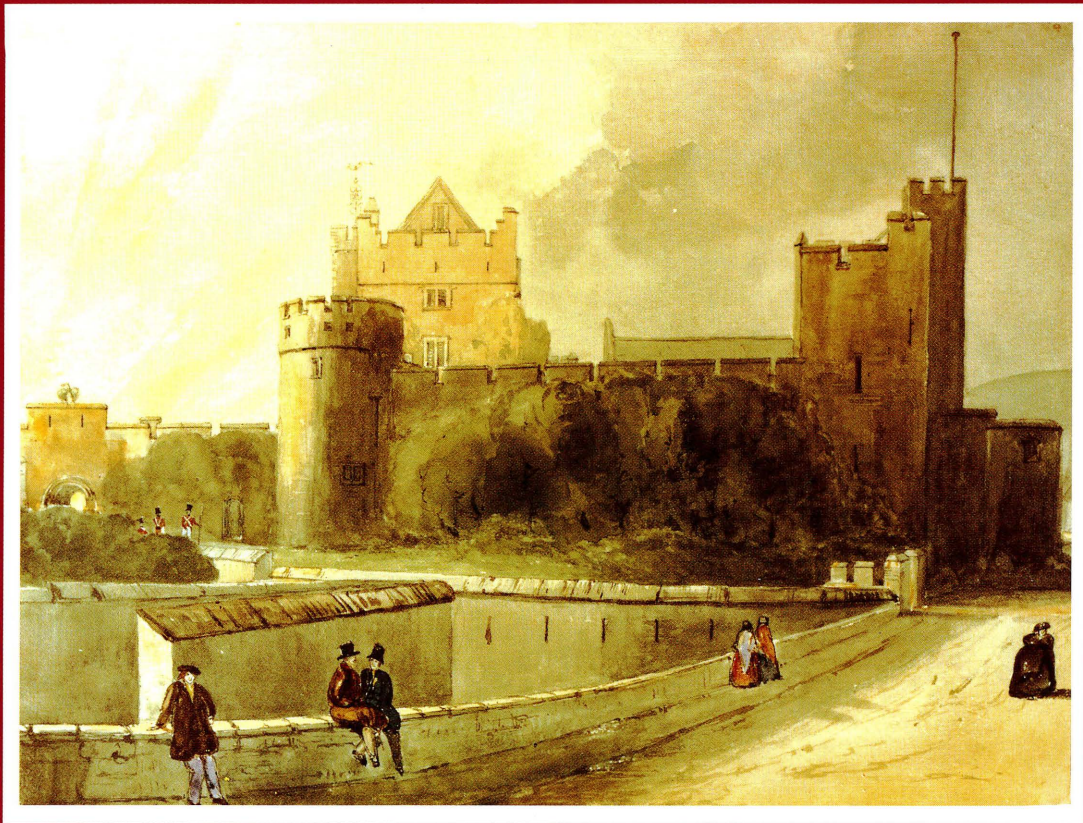


introduction



Situated on a rocky island in the River Suir, Cahir Castle is one of the largest and best preserved castles in Ireland. The castle was built originally in the 13th century on the site of an earlier native Irish fortification called a cathair (stone fort), which gave its name to the place. It was granted to the powerful Butler family, Earls of Ormond, in the late 14th century and became the seat of a cadet branch of the family, the Lords of Cahir. The castle was enlarged and extensively remodelled in the 15th to 17th century period but was abandoned by the family and allowed to fall into ruin in the late 18th century. It was partly restored by the Cahir Butlers in the 1840s and more extensively restored in recent years by the State after being acquired as a National Monument. It is at present managed by Dúchas The Heritage Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands.

Cahir is a fine example of a late medieval castle and in its development illustrates the changes in castle design and defensive techniques over the centuries. It is also particularly important because there are detailed contemporary illustrations of a siege of the castle in 1599.



Cahir Castle 1843

history

The full form of the placename in Irish is *Cathair Dhún Iascaigh*, which could be translated as the stone fort of the fortress of the fishery. According to Geoffrey Keating's 17th-century history of Ireland, *Dún Iascaigh* was one of the royal seats of residence of the Kings of Munster before the arrival of Christianity in the 5th century and was refortified by Brian Boraimhe, King of Munster and later High King of Ireland, who was killed at the battle of Clontarf in 1014.

At the time of the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169 the area around Cahir was under the overlordship of the O'Briens of Thomond, the descendants of Brian Boraimhe. By the 1190s much of present Co. Tipperary was conquered from the Irish and in 1192 the area around Cahir was granted to Philip of Worcester by John, Lord of Ireland, who later became King John. Around the same time Theobald Walter, the ancestor of the Butler family, was granted extensive tracts of land in the north of the present county of Tipperary. The very fine motte and bailey at Knockgraffon, 5.6 km north of Cahir, probably represents the original administrative headquarters or *caput* of Philip's lordship: there would have been a substantial wooden tower or *bretèche* on top of the motte, a high steep-sided artificial mound beside the Suir.

The earliest visible remains of building at Cahir Castle belong to the 13th century but how much, if any, was built by Philip of Worcester and how much by his nephew and heir, William, is uncertain.

history



Basilia, the great-granddaughter of William of Worcester, by her marriage to Milo de Bermingham, brought the lordship into the Bermingham family. After the capture, attainder and execution of Sir William de Bermingham by Sir Anthony Lucy, the justiciar, in 1332, allegedly for his part in a conspiracy to make the Earl of Desmond King of Ireland, the barony of Cahir reverted to the English Crown, with which it remained until 1375. What actually seems to have happened is that Cahir and much of Tipperary had fallen into the hands of the O'Briens. Brian O'Brien had burned Athassel in 1329 and in 1332 he burned the town of Cahir.

In 1375 the barony of Cahir was granted to James, third Earl of Ormond, and to Elizabeth, his wife. James was the head of the great Anglo-Norman family of the Butlers, descendants of Theobald Walter. Assigning these lands to the Earl of Ormond at a time when the English power in Ireland was at its lowest ebb was probably deemed to be a more effective way of asserting royal authority than an empty claim to hold Cahir as Crown property since the Earls of Ormond were regarded as the most trustworthy of the great Anglo-Irish leaders. Cahir was on the borders of their territory and that of the Earls of Desmond in the late middle ages. In 1405 at James' death Cahir passed to his natural son James (Séamus Gallda) by Katherine, daughter of the 3rd Earl of Desmond, from whom descended the Cahir branch of the Butlers.

As well as uniting the two great houses of Butler (Ormond) and Fitzgerald (Desmond), the Cahir Butlers quartered the de Bermingham arms with their own, suggesting that one of them had contracted a marriage alliance with

the previous owners. The bulk of what is now to be seen at Cahir Castle belongs to the 15th and 16th centuries and is presumably the work of successive Butler owners. Their land lay between the territories of the Earls of Ormond and Desmond, to both of whom they were related. They seem to have kept a rather low profile politically, though inclining more to the Gaelic way of life than the Earls of Ormond.

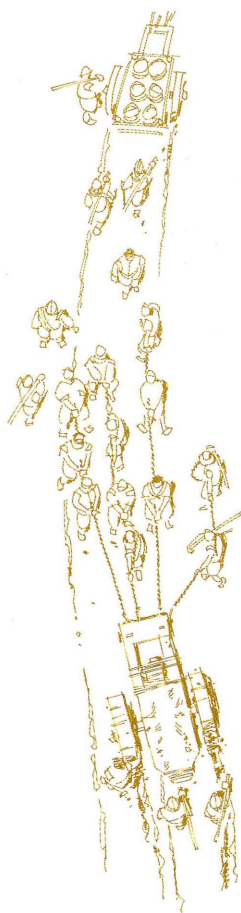
In 1543 Thomas Butler "*of Chaier or Caher-down-Eske in the barony of Kilteneenen*" was created Baron Caher by Henry VIII with remainder to the heirs of his body. This was an unusual provision, inasmuch as most peerages were confined to heirs male. His only surviving son, Edmund, died in 1560, shortly after his father, with the result that the barony fell into abeyance, there being two surviving sisters, each with equal rights of succession. In 1583 this situation was resolved by the conferring of a fresh title of Baron of Caher on Theobald Butler, a nephew of Thomas. In order to clear the way for this move, the heirs generally, that is, Thomas' daughters or their representatives, surrendered all rights to the original title. The revival of the title was intended as a mark of royal favour. This Theobald was a patron of bardic poets and no less than seven poems in Irish addressed to him survive. In one of these Cahir Castle is called *Cathair dhaoineach* [populous] *Dúna hlasg* and described as *fionnbhruagh réidh fhairsing úr* (a fair smooth spacious bright palace). Thomas, Theobald's son and heir, after succeeding him on his death in 1596, joined in the rebellion of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, against the English Crown.

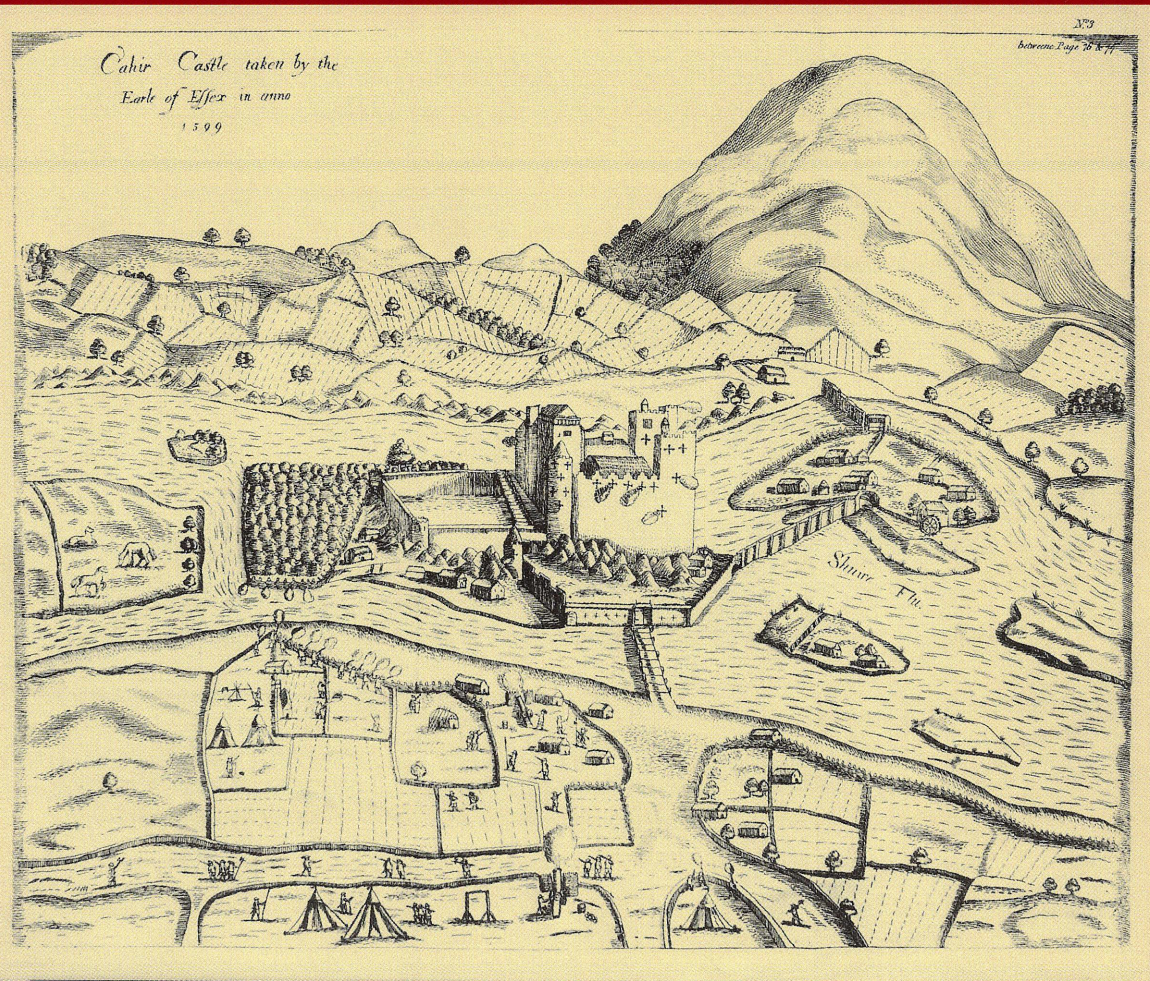
Thomas was not personally very impressive; he is described as "*simple and foolish*". However, his position as owner of Cahir Castle, referred to by Reynolds, Secretary to the Earl of Essex, as "*the only famous castle of Ireland which was thought impregnable and is the bulwark for Munster and a safe retreat for all the agents of Spain and Rome*", made his defection a matter of serious concern to the authorities in Dublin. Queen Elizabeth's favourite, the Earl of Essex, was sent over to Ireland in 1599 as Lord Lieutenant with an army of almost 18,000 men to defeat Tyrone. Instead of invading Ulster, Essex marched south from Dublin on May 9th and two days later captured Athy Castle and joined forces with the Earl of Ormond, who brought with him his kinsmen Lords Mountgarrett and Caher.

history

The latter, after at first refusing a request from Ormond to join him, had on the same day that Essex left Dublin come over to the side of Ormond and Essex. By May 23rd Essex had reached Clonmel and sent Lord Caher forward to parley with the garrison of Cahir Castle, then under the command of his younger brother, James Gallda Butler. The garrison having refused to surrender, Essex advanced from Clonmel with a force of two to three thousand foot soldiers and two hundred horse; he also had two guns, a cannon and a culverin, which had to be dragged to Cahir by the English soldiers, as there were no draught horses available. This was probably the only occasion when Cahir Castle was seriously attacked. Its island site and very strong defences were proof against the ordinary hazards of Irish siege warfare, but Essex's arrival with artillery, albeit not in great quantity, put a new complexion on affairs.

We are fortunate to have a contemporary view of the siege from a book published in London in 1633 called *Pacata Hibernia*. The Castle is recognisably the same in broad outline as what we see today, with minor exceptions such as the stepped battlements of the normal Irish form, which were replaced in the 19th century by the existing ones. The present bridge over the Suir is of fairly recent date: the bridge in 1599 came across at a point in the middle of the east curtain of the inner ward of the Castle. A manuscript map of the siege also survives and though not an accurate survey of the castle it shows the layout of the walls and main buildings. Both the cannon and the culverin broke down from time to time, early artillery being somewhat unreliable but on the third day of the assault (May 28th) the east wall was substantially breached and the Castle taken with the loss of about 80 of its defenders. James Gallda, Lord Caher's brother, escaped with some of his followers by swimming under the water mill; he, in fact, recaptured the Castle in the following year and held it for some months. It may be said that the Earl of Essex's capture of Cahir was almost the sole success of his Irish campaign and given the fact that he had cannon, was more or less inevitable. However, it had little bearing on the general course of the war, since it was nowhere near Tyrone's stronghold in Ulster.





The Siege of Cahir Castle 1599 from *Pacata Hibernia*

history

Thomas, Lord Caher, was attainted but received a full pardon in 1601, probably due to Ormond's influence and continued in occupation at Cahir until his death in 1627.

Cahir escaped fairly lightly during the Cromwellian period. In 1647 Lord Inchiquin, popularly known as Murrough of the Burnings, took Cahir Castle within a few hours on behalf of the Parliament. By 1650 it had to be retaken by Cromwell. Piers, 4th Baron Caher, was a minor at this time, the Castle being held on his behalf by George Mathews, a half-brother of the Earl of Ormond. Cromwell's letter to Mathews survives in the British Museum.

"Before Cahir, 24th February 1650.

Sir - having brought the army and my cannon near this place, according to my usual manner in summoning places, I thought fit to offer you terms honourable to soldiers: that you may march away with your baggage, arms and colours, free from injuries or violence. But if I be, notwithstanding, necessitated to bend my cannon upon you, you must expect the extremity usual in such cases. To avoid blood, this is offered to you by

Your servant, Oliver Cromwell. "

Cromwell's practice in Ireland seems to have been to give a beleaguered garrison one chance only to surrender on favourable terms. If this was declined, the garrison might expect the worst when they were vanquished. We may take it that as the garrison of Cahir marched out *"with their banners displayed, in body and posture of fight, and with all their arms, bag and baggage"* that they had not, in fact, attempted resistance.



Cahir Castle from the north

history

Presumably the sight of Cromwell's artillery was enough to make it plain that the defences of Cahir were insufficient to hold out successfully. Cromwell went on from Cahir to capture Kilkenny, the war continuing sporadically in Co. Tipperary till 1652. It was actually at Cahir Castle that articles of agreement were signed between the local Confederate leaders and the Cromwellian commanders.

The lands of Cahir were surveyed by Sir William Petty under the Commonwealth, but had not been allotted to any Cromwellian grantee at the time of the Restoration of Charles II. Consequently Ormond had no difficulty in getting his kinsman, Lord Caher, reinstated in 1662. Piers, 6th Baron Caher, died "*of a surfeit of claret*" at his house in Ireland in 1677. His successor, Theobald, 7th Baron Caher, sat in James II's Irish Parliament in 1689 and was outlawed in 1691. He was, however, restored to his honours in 1693, though apparently with some loss to his estates. The Butlers of Cahir survived through the 18th century discreetly as Catholic peers. They are said to have lived at Reihill, a few miles from Cahir, during the 18th century prior to 1780, when James, 9th Lord Caher, seems to have gone to France, where he died in 1786.

The antiquary, Austin Cooper, gives us an interesting glimpse of Cahir as it was in 1784: "*No town within my memory has been more improved than Cahir - for this it stands not indebted to the advantages of a pleasant situation in a very fine County on the banks of the Suir, but to the munificence of its Lord who tho' not a constant resident here does not forget the ancient Seat of his family*". After mentioning various improvements, Cooper goes on to regret that "*at the same time he has let the Castle the Old Mansion go to ruin, the situation of which exclusive of many other delightful spots is sufficient to surprise the*

most tasteless beholder at its not being adopted, or rather revived. It is but a few years ago since this Castle was inhabited by Mr. Fennell who kept a number of Woolcombers at work in it, it is now quite neglected and every floor hanging in Jeopardy". William Fennell, who was presumably Lord Caher's agent, seems to have found some sort of living accommodation there and used the buildings for industrial purposes till 1780, when he leased Reihill from Lord Caher, after which the Castle fell into decay.

Cathair dhaoineach Dúna hIasg,
teaghdhais taoibhgheal na dtirmriasg,
ō tá dá ráth tar Fhíadh nAirt
nī bhiam do chách dā cogailt.

Nī choigeól, nī choiglid cách
múr nōsmhar na nós neamhghnáth;
teisd ríomhúir nī hiongnadh air,
foinnbhrugh fhíonDúin an Iasguigh.



history

The main line of the Butlers of Cahir died out in 1788 with the death of Piers, 10th Baron Caher, in Paris. In what was literally a rags to riches story, the title and property eventually passed to a distant cousin, Richard Butler, who, at a young age, became the 12th Baron Caher. About 1810 he built the beautiful Swiss Cottage to the south of Cahir. (In more recent times, the Swiss Cottage, after restoration, was presented to the State in 1989 and is now also under the management of Dúchas.) In 1816 Lord Caher received the additional honours of Viscount Caher and Earl of Glengall. He died of fever in 1819 at Cahir at the age of 43.

Richard, 13th Baron Caher and 2nd and last Earl of Glengall, sat as M.P. for Co. Tipperary from 1818 till he succeeded his father in the following year. Later on, from 1829 till his death in 1858, he sat in the House of Lords as a Representative Irish Peer. The town of Cahir bears the impress of the Earl of Glengall and his architect, William Tinsley. A good many 61-year leases in the town of Cahir had been made about 1780 by James Lord Caher, apparently at the time when he was departing for France. When these started to expire in the early 1840's the Earl gave fresh leases in which he stipulated that the structures to be erected should comply with his wishes. The great building period seems to have been from 1840 to 1846.

One of the houses built at this time has a stone tablet with the initials W. T. set into the front, confirming the connection with Tinsley. William Tinsley (1804-1885) was a native of Clonmel and came of a long line of builders. Up to the time of his departure for America in 1851 he designed a large number of buildings in various styles, mostly in the Clonmel-Cahir-Waterford area. He found in the Earl of Glengall one of his most munificent patrons, at least until the Earl got into financial difficulties.

history

Cahir Castle may be said to have assumed its present appearance between 1840 and 1846 at the hands of the Earl of Glengall and William Tinsley. Unfortunately, the work done at this time is not well documented. There is a brief note in a manuscript notebook of 1843 of Lord Glengall's that *"there are so many inconveniences in the castle for making it a Residence that after long consideration I doubt the prudence of doing so. The Castle of Cahir should always be preserved, as the ancient Memorial of the Family"*.

Tinsley's part in the work is nowhere mentioned by the Earl of Glengall but is attested in a manuscript notebook of Tinsley's covering the years 1846 to 1849, preserved in America by Tinsley's descendants. Some of the entries for the year 1846 refer to Tinsley's work at the Castle but these notes are not very detailed and belong to a time when the work on the Castle was already drawing to a close. It is possible to distinguish most of the 19th century work at Cahir, but it would be extremely valuable if there had been a record of the exact condition of the Castle immediately before works began but it appears that no such record exists.

The estates of the Earl of Glengall passed through the Encumbered Estates Court in 1853 and he himself died in 1858. His daughter, Lady Margaret Charteris and her son, Lieut. Col. Richard Butler Charteris, either retained or regained possession of Cahir Castle and continued to live at Cahir Lodge nearby. Cahir Castle was taken into State care as a National Monument in 1964, a few years after the death of Col. Charteris. In 1964 the hall was the only building still in use and since then extensive conservation and restoration works have been carried out on it and the other buildings by the State. This included the restoration of the portcullis with the fitting of a new winding drum and gear.



the medieval castle and its development

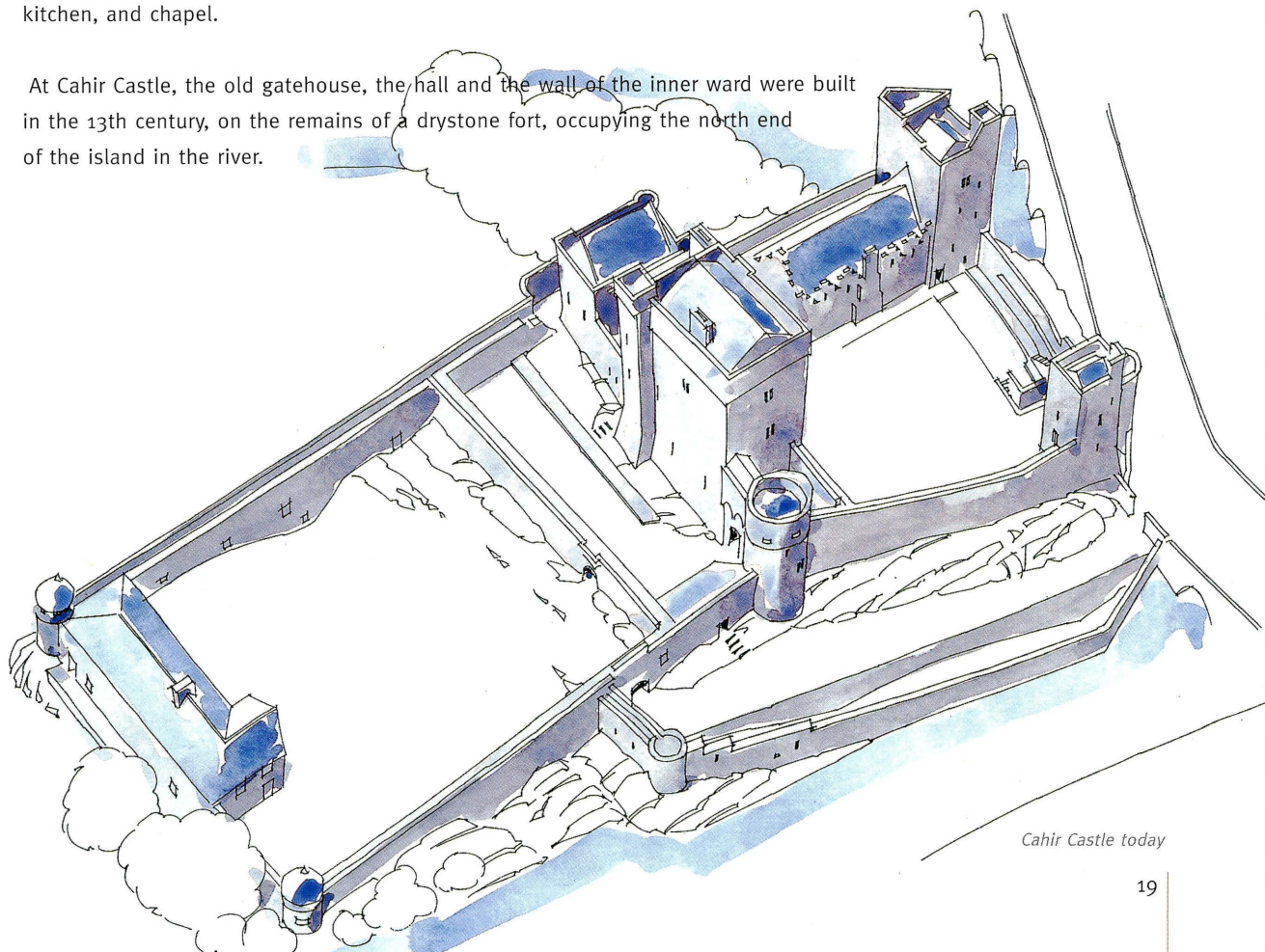
The structure of castles such as Cahir have been changed and modified as the ebb and flow of conquest and settlement alternated with peaceful interludes. In turbulent times, defensive needs were paramount and thus structures would have been modified to meet new methods of warfare. Peace allowed the emphasis to shift towards more comfortable living conditions. External influences from Europe would also have made their mark on Irish castles.



Cahir Castle in the 13th century

In the 13th century, the medieval castle usually consisted of a gate house/strong tower providing access to a walled enclosure or ward. The necessities for a nobleman's accommodation, apart from the lodgings, which were in the gate house/strong tower, were often built along the enclosing walls. These included a single storey great hall, kitchen, and chapel.

At Cahir Castle, the old gatehouse, the hall and the wall of the inner ward were built in the 13th century, on the remains of a drystone fort, occupying the north end of the island in the river.



Cahir Castle today

the medieval castle and its development

The approach to the castle was up a path from the river, crossed by a ford or bridge, on to a wooden bridge outside the gatehouse, and into a tunnel-like passage with doors, a murderhole, and perhaps a portcullis. The gatehouse (the tower containing the gateway) provided two storeys of accommodation for the lord's family and a fighting platform above. Through the gatehouse, was the main or inner ward of the castle. The hall, along one side of the ward, provided a space for formal meetings such as the manor court and for feasting.

We are fortunate to have both a plan of the castle and a view from 1599 (see page 9). This shows that the hall was apparently single storeyed with a central hearth, suggested by a cowl on the roof in this 1599 view. The line of the old roof can be seen on the side of the later tower, built in the late 15th/early 16th century. A kitchen would have stood adjacent to the hall. The curtain wall around the inner ward of the castle still stands, but has been raised since the early years, repaired, and extended outwards to accommodate a tower on its northwest corner. By the end of the 16th century fine rectangular towers occupying the two northern corners had been added to the main wall, the entrance had moved to the side of the old gatehouse, beside a circular tower, and a large rectangular enclosure with small round corner towers had been added to the south. A crosswall divided this enclosure into a middle and an outer ward and it appears that the narrow middle ward was further divided by a wall laid close to the foot of the old gatehouse. Beside these castle wards the approach from the river was walled in to form the barbican and provided with a small tower looking out over the bridge.

The northwest corner tower was added to the castle to provide accommodation (rooms and toilets) at the end of the hall, to look out over the approach from the west, and to house guns.

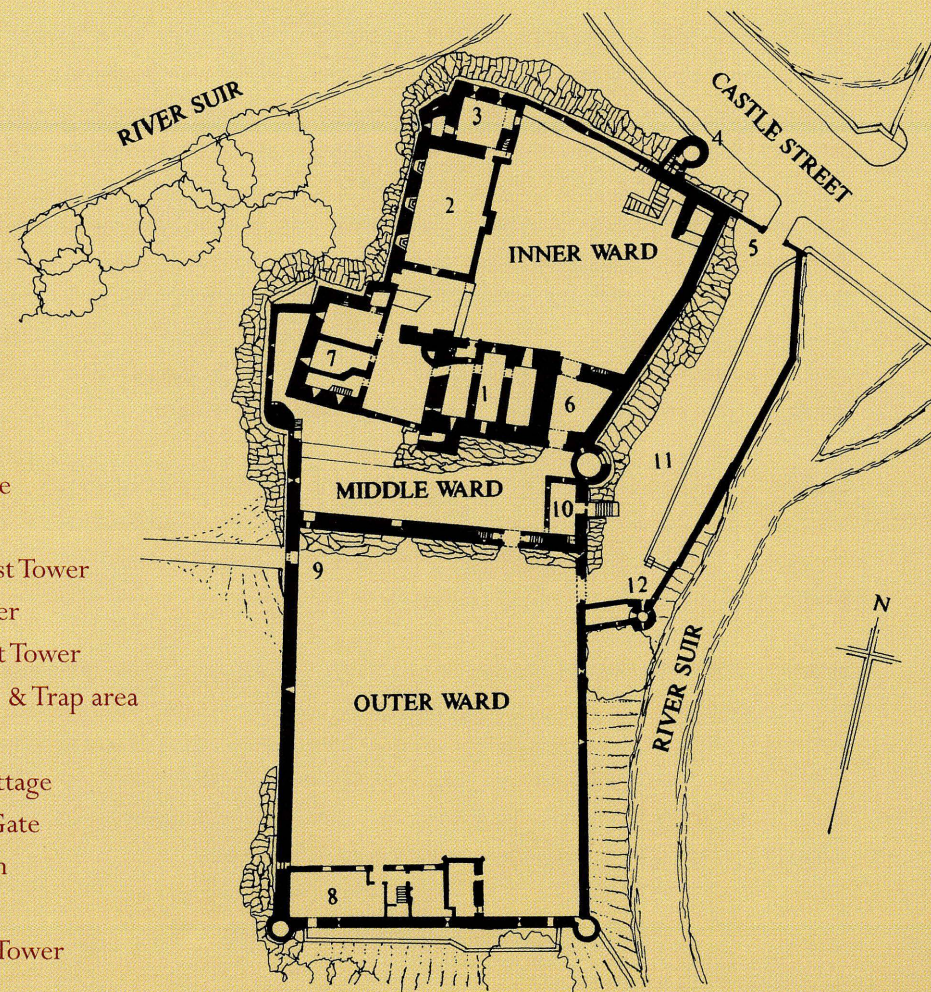
On the lowest floor a large room has two double-splayed openings facing north. The openings are characteristic embrasures for guns, and they reach almost to the floor, suggesting the use of gun barrels strapped to low wooden beds rather than carriages. The embrasures are original to the tower, implying a construction date in the late 15th century or early 16th century. Earlier and later openings for handguns can also be seen at the castle. A number of distinctive stirrup loops have survived in the round tower beside the portcullis and elsewhere. These gun loops may be very early, from the late 15th century, the earliest days of firearms in Ireland. Late 16th-century handgun loops can be seen in the wall of the middle ward. These are quite different, small holes almost invisible in the outside face of the wall. By the late 16th century handguns were common in Ireland, but large guns were rarely used.

Because of the turbulent conditions in Ireland in the 16th and 17th centuries, practically no furniture survives from that or earlier times. In all probability, the walls of the main rooms at Cahir would have been hung with tapestries while other rooms would have had wooden panelling (wainscot) on the walls.

Beds and bed furniture were the most costly items. Bed furniture would often consist of embroidered curtains and canopies, while the beds were dressed with feather mattresses and covers, sometimes of fleeces or animal skins. Chairs were usually of carved wood of two principal types; 'armed chairs' (with arms) or back stools without arms. Some chairs would have been covered in silk velvet with expensive fringing. Tables, either plain or carved, often were covered with carpet.

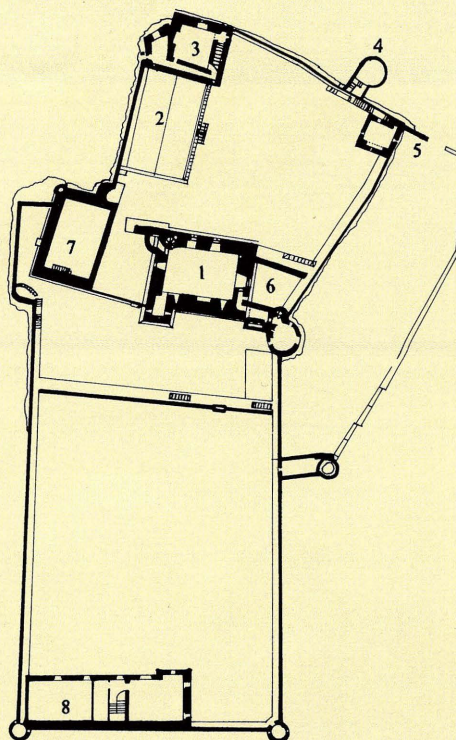
ground level

1. Gatehouse
2. Hall
3. Northwest Tower
4. Well Tower
5. Northeast Tower
6. Portcullis & Trap area
7. Toilets
8. Cahir Cottage
9. Postern Gate
10. Reception
11. Barbican
12. Barbican Tower

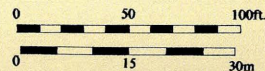
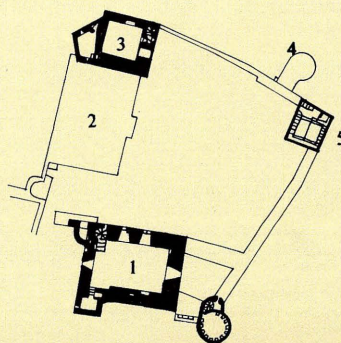


first floor

1. Gatehouse
2. Hall
3. Northwest Tower
4. Well Tower
5. Northeast Tower
6. Portcullis & Trap area
7. Toilets
8. Cahir Cottage



second floor





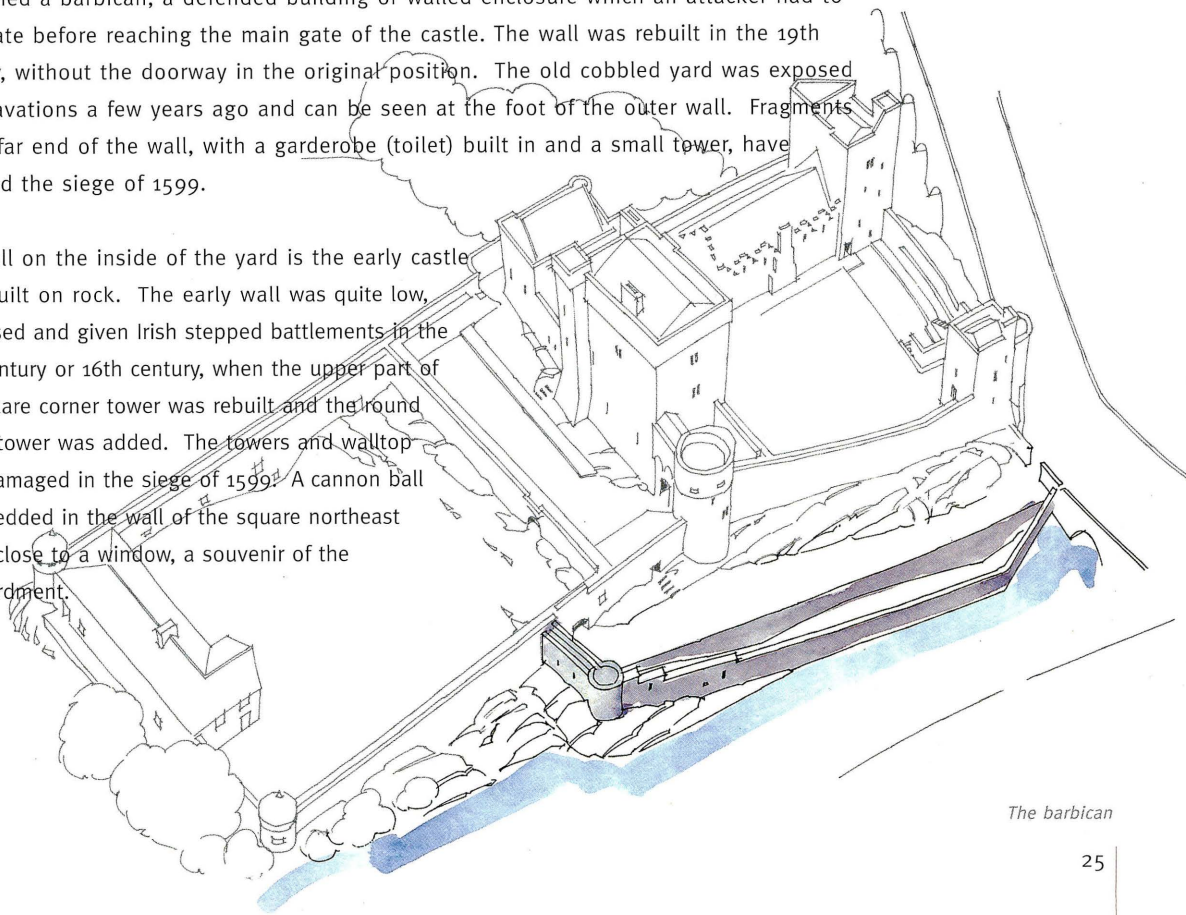
The barbican and entrance to the Castle

description of the castle

The barbican.

The old approach to the castle crossed a channel of the river beside the present bridge. It entered an outer walled enclosure through a simple gate in a low wall. This enclosure can be termed a barbican, a defended building or walled enclosure which an attacker had to penetrate before reaching the main gate of the castle. The wall was rebuilt in the 19th century, without the doorway in the original position. The old cobbled yard was exposed by excavations a few years ago and can be seen at the foot of the outer wall. Fragments of the far end of the wall, with a garderobe (toilet) built in and a small tower, have survived the siege of 1599.

The wall on the inside of the yard is the early castle wall, built on rock. The early wall was quite low, but raised and given Irish stepped battlements in the 15th century or 16th century, when the upper part of the square corner tower was rebuilt and the round corner tower was added. The towers and walltop were damaged in the siege of 1599. A cannon ball is embedded in the wall of the square northeast tower, close to a window, a souvenir of the bombardment.



The barbican

description of the castle

Beyond the round corner tower the wall continues, not around the early Anglo-Norman fortress but around an added enclosure, the outer ward. This area was probably walled in the 16th century. The gateway from the barbican to the outer ward must have been badly damaged in the siege; it was reconstructed in its original position in the 19th century. Beside the gateway a protecting gunloop largely survived the attack; it has the characteristic Irish double splay popular in the 15th and 16th centuries. The steps and small entry to the reception area are a recent addition.

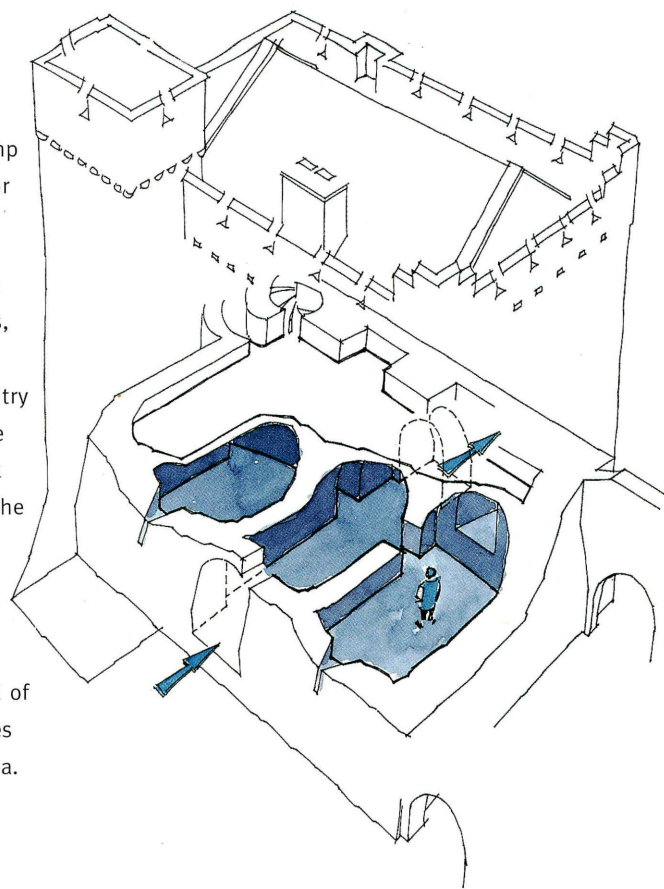


The outer ward and Cahir Cottage

The outer and middle wards

The outer ward is a large walled rectangle probably constructed in the early 16th century, divided by an inserted wall in the late 16th century. Between the dividing wall and the inner ward of the castle the stump of another wall can be seen, either an earlier divider or a low curtain wall predating the outer ward wall.

The outer ward has turrets at its outside corners; both the turrets and the wall have double-splayed gunloops, whilst the standing dividing wall has the later form of loops with small, irregular openings facing out. The entry through the dividing wall appears to have survived the 1599 siege undamaged (the impressions of wickerwork to form the arch can still be seen over the gate), but the outer ward wall facing the present car park has undergone huge repairs, suggesting that this wall was breached by cannon fire. The wall of the inner ward, overlooking the car park, does not appear to have been breached. A house, Cahir Cottage, was built at the far end of the outer ward in the 19th century; today it accommodates an audiovisual introduction to the historic sites of the area.



The 13th century gatehouse showing the original entrance

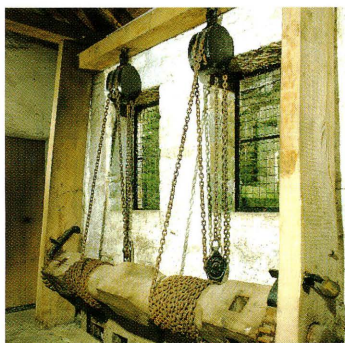
description of the castle

The inner ward, the gateway and walls.

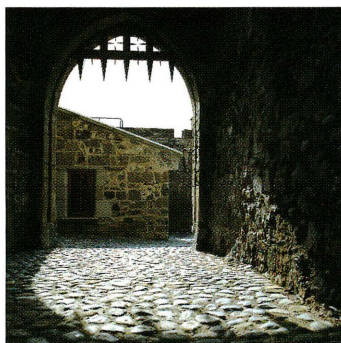
By the early 16th century, entry to the inner ward was through a gateway protected by a lifting iron-lattice gate called a portcullis and overlooked by a round tower on one side and the old rectangular gatehouse on the other. This gateway replaced the original entrance through the ground floor of the gatehouse (see previous page). The cut stone around the old entrance has been removed (and possibly reassembled for the new gateway), but a relieving arch in the wall of the old gatehouse betrays the position of the original gateway.

The old gatehouse is the most complete early building at the castle, the Anglo-Norman lord's accommodation protecting access to the inner ward. A projecting rectangular turret was added to the 13th century front in the 15th or 16th century, to overlook the new entrance and the wall to the west. Ragged stonework where the turret joins the west side of the gatehouse shows that the wall was higher than it is today as reconstructed in the 19th century.

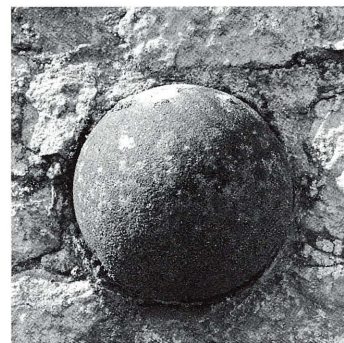
On the east side of the old gatehouse there are two gateways, one behind the other, with a small yard between. A fire has raged in the small yard, splitting stones in the walls, perhaps at the time of the siege. The second gate opens onto the inner ward, the main yard of the castle and site of the pre-Norman fort.



The portcullis machinery



The portcullis



1599 cannonball in the wall of the northeast tower

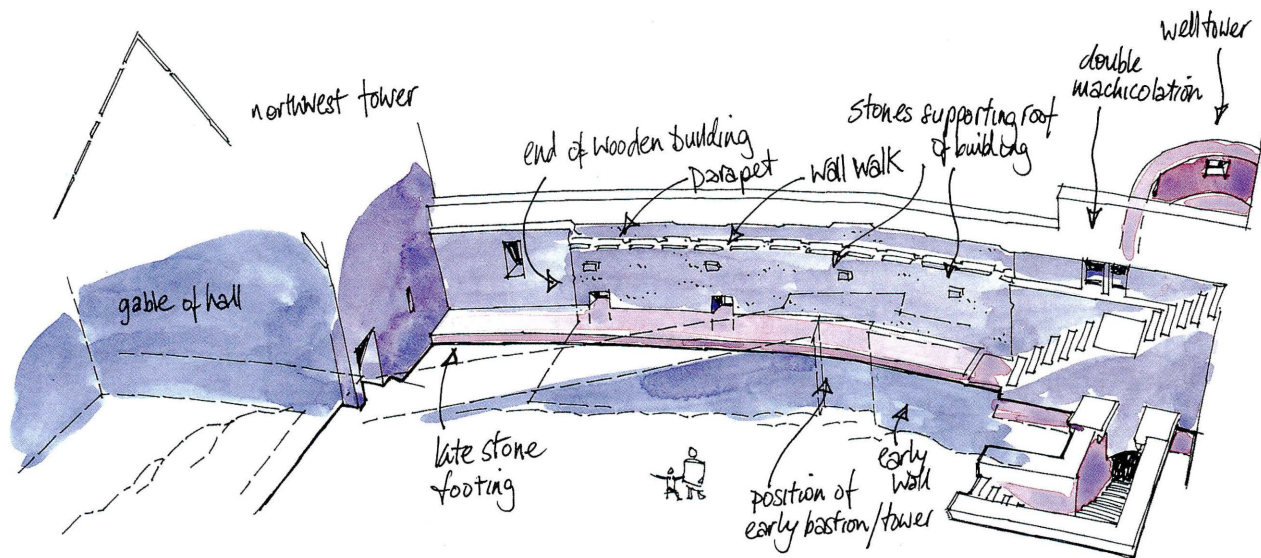


The gatehouse (centre) with later gateway to right.

description of the castle

The northeast tower.

The rectangular tower in the northeast corner of the inner ward looks much as it did in early 1599. The vault over the basement prison, the chamber above, and the platform at roof level, were built when the inner ward wall overlooking the present car park was raised, probably in the late 15th century. However the base of the tower, with its elegant batter (on the outside of the corner) is much older. Either an earlier tower or the gable of a stone building was set in this corner position when the castle wall was constructed in the 13th century.



The north wall and well tower

The north wall and well tower.

The earliest stonework in the north wall of the castle can only be seen from outside, from the bridge. It runs from the corner below the northeast tower to a repair halfway along the present wall. The repair has followed the removal of a projection, an early bastion or tower. Beyond the repair the early wall would have swung in towards the gable end of the hall.

With the construction of the large northwest tower onto the end of the hall, in the 15th century, the castle wall moved to its present line, and was raised sufficiently high above ground level inside the ward to accommodate a single storey wooden building against the wall, a wall walk at roof level and a parapet above. The building caught fire at some point (long before the 1599 siege), shattering stones on the inside face of the wall.

After the fire, the wall to the east was raised and the northeast tower was built in its present form. A double machicolation (an overhanging piece of wall with an opening underneath) overlooked a door through the wall close to the new tower. The door has not survived; sometime after the 1599 siege the exit was replaced with a rock-cut passage below the wall, leading to water in the basement of a new tower, the well tower.

A low stone footing against the inside of the north castle wall is the remains of a late modification, a bank of earth and perhaps rubble to cushion the wall against pounding from artillery. The bank must have been added in the 16th or 17th century; it is not known whether it was in place by 1599.

description of the castle

The northwest tower.

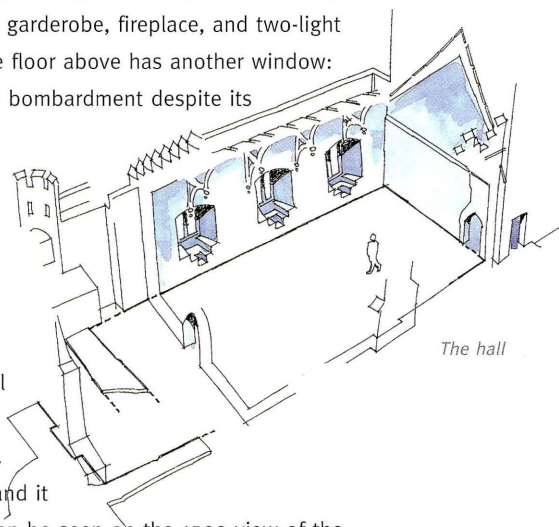
The large tower at the northwest corner of the castle was built against the gable end of the hall, probably in the second half of the 15th century. Originally it had only a single entry, from the end of the hall, and had no access to wallwalks on either side. The single doorway is protected by a murderhole.

The main chamber on the ground floor is vaulted, and has two early loops for big guns in the north wall. This vaulted chamber facilitated the entertainment of important guests away from the hurly-burly atmosphere of the hall. The floor above has an original garderobe, fireplace, and two-light window with stone seats to each side. The main room on the floor above has another window: the stone frame appears to be original, a survivor of the 1599 bombardment despite its position facing the English guns.

The hall.

In the Middle Ages, the hall was the most important of the outer rooms in the castle where feasts, celebrations and entertainment took place. However, the appearance of the hall at Cahir has been greatly altered and only the west wall, and some of the north wall, of the original building have survived. Both of the surviving walls were part of the castle enclosure and it is possible that the other walls were timbered (no east wall can be seen on the 1599 view of the castle, only a thatched roof and a cowl for a central fireplace).

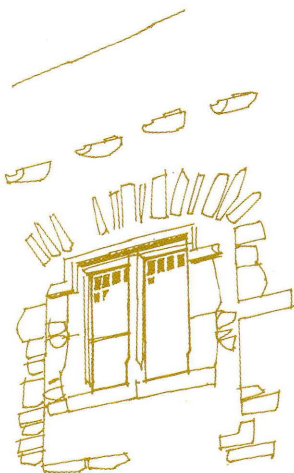
The south and east walls of the hall were rebuilt in the 19th century. The pitch of the hall roof in the 15th century can be seen from the outside, in the stone flashing against the northwest tower.



The northwest tower and hall



description of the castle



The roof was steeper than the present (19th century) version, but the eaves were close to the present level, suggesting a single main storey. The original hall may have been longer than the present building, with four windows looking out to the west. Three of the windows were redesigned in the 15th or 16th century; if there had been a fourth it was blocked at this stage and the south end of the building was altered.

A large fireplace and chimney built against the wall of the gatehouse may have heated a longer version of the hall but was probably built to serve a kitchen beyond the hall. Rooms overhead were entered from the gatehouse. Today the fireplace stands in the open. At the upper end of the hall there would have stood a raised dais where the principal table would have been placed for the owner of the castle and his most important guests. This was usually covered by a carpet. Other furnishing was sparse; tables would have been of the trestle type allowing these to be readily moved.

The gatehouse.

The core of the building is the original main tower and gatehouse of the 13th-century castle. The position of the original central entrance passage can be seen in the front and back of the building. At first floor level in the back wall, part of a rough stone relieving arch marks the position of an original window.

The rectangular windows and small door in the gatehouse are alterations of the 15th or 16th century. The top of the building, the parapet and machicolation over the door, are of the same date although heavily restored in the 19th century. The spiral stairs in the corner of the building is probably original; at first floor level this opened onto the lord's private



The gatehouse

hall. The present large fireplace is late (15th/16th century), and probably replaced a simpler original. A garderobe would have been built into one of the walls, probably in the southeast corner. A passage to the round corner tower was later inserted in this corner. A replacement garderobe was provided in the rectangular turret, added to the front of the gatehouse around the time when the entrance through the basement was blocked. A passage beside the stairs, in another late turret, would have led to a chamber over the kitchen at the south end of the hall; a similar passage on the floor above would have led into the attic storey.

The lofty space in the gatehouse, above the lord's private hall, was two storeys of the late medieval building. These large open areas were sometimes divided by wooden partitions or moveable wooden screens. Sparse furnishings allowed for flexibility of use, a feature of rooms in medieval buildings.

After the rebuilding of the parapet and roof in the 15th century an attic storey was built into the roof space above the main chamber. A number of windows were inserted when the top of the gatehouse was remodelled. One of these can only be seen from the outside; it was blocked by a chimney for the fireplace below.

the town and abbey

In 1332 Cahir was one of the towns burned by Brian O'Brien. There would have been a settlement outside the castle walls at Cahir from the 13th century at least, but the location of the town is unknown. By the 18th century, the centre of the town was on the hillside on the east bank of the river. The drawing of Cahir Castle under siege in 1599 shows no sizeable settlement on the west side of the river; from which we might assume that the town was to the east, outside the picture. The ruins of a church close to the present town centre, has stonework dating back to the 15th century. This may indicate the site and date of the town on the east bank, but might not represent the earliest town.

Cahir Priory (also known as Cahir Abbey) was founded in the closing years of the 12th century, just after the stone fort on the island was granted to an Anglo-Norman lord, and when the motte and bailey at Knockgraffon were new. Perhaps before the early stone buildings at Cahir Castle were built the mortared stone church at the abbey was under construction.

The priory was extensively rebuilt in the late medieval period, when the new towers and wards were added at the castle, and when the church was built on the east bank of the river. The priory's east range was rebuilt with a vaulted ceiling to the ground floor, a tower was built at the end of the refectory, and the church was given a tower, a new north wall, a new east window and a new roof. A parapet with battlements rimmed the church roof. By 1540 the abbey was well fortified, in keeping with most Irish churches at the time.



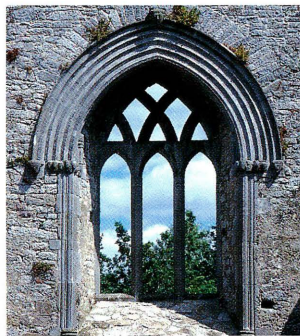
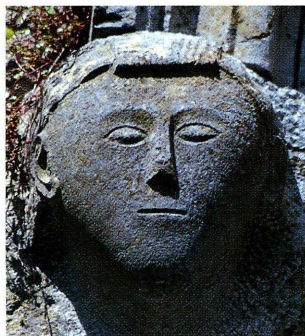
Cahir Abbey

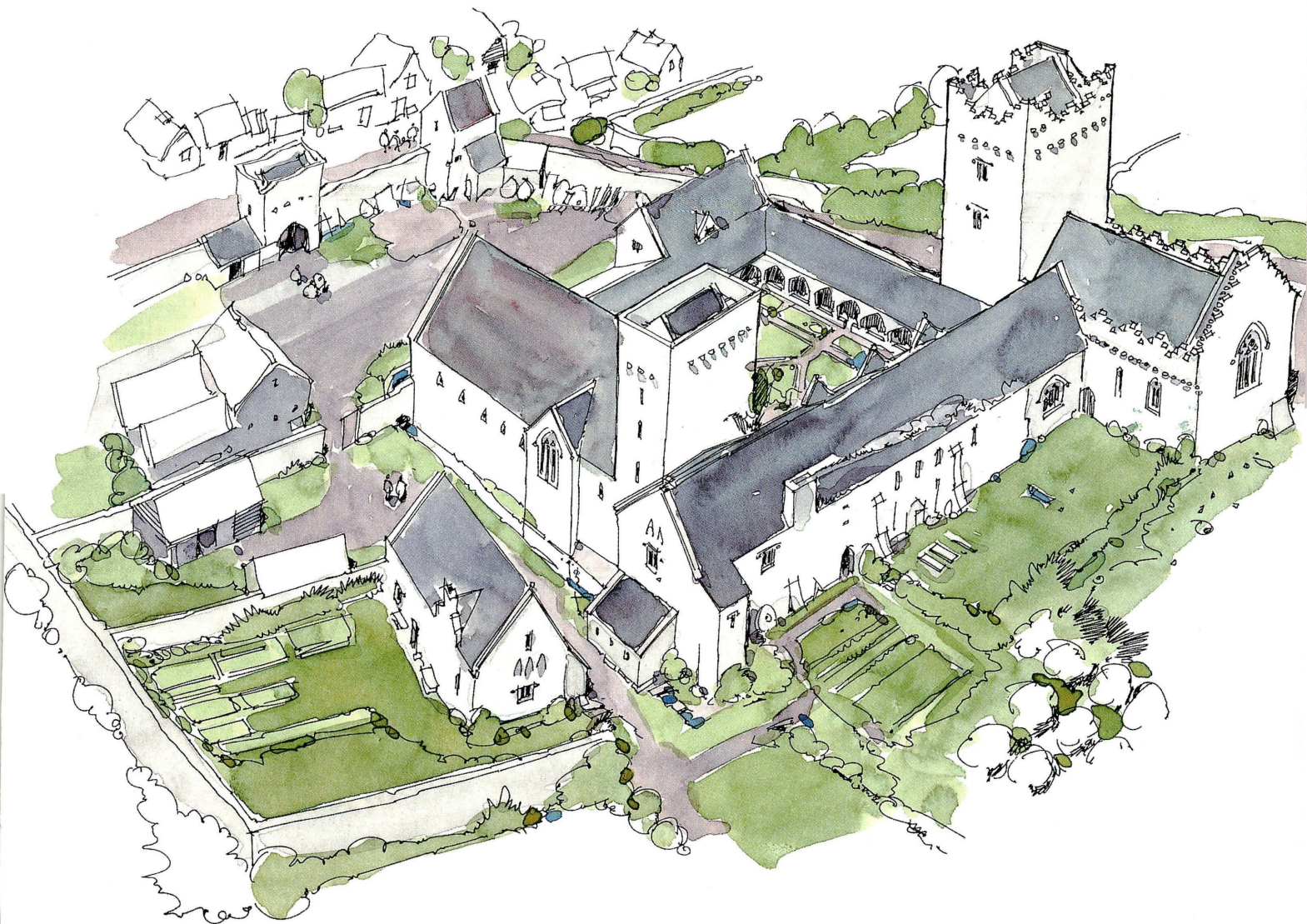
the town and abbey

The original church at the abbey was short and freestanding. When the monastic buildings were added in stone, in the 13th or 14th century, the ranges spread out well to the west. With the construction of the church tower in the late 15th or 16th century the north and east walls of the church were rebuilt, but the old west wall remained standing, and still stands today.

The abbey was built and used by Augustinian canons, generally popular because they worked beyond the abbey walls. Their church, though small, was shared by the public. In 1540, at the dissolution of the monasteries, it was claimed that the church building had served as the parish church "*from time immemorial*".

It is quite possible that the medieval town of Cahir sprang up between the castle and the abbey, on the west bank of the river, perhaps with its centre closer to the abbey than the castle.





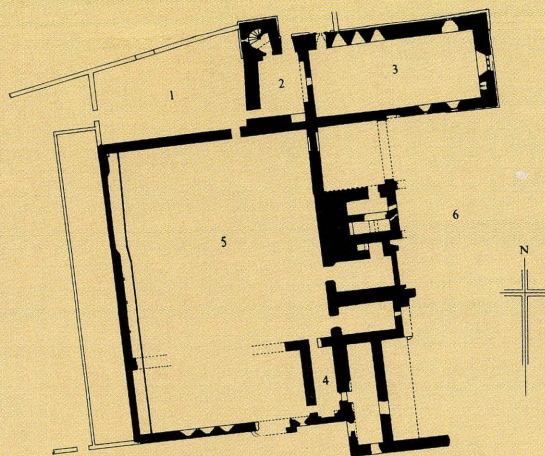
A reconstruction of Cahir Abbey in the early 16th century

Cahir Abbey

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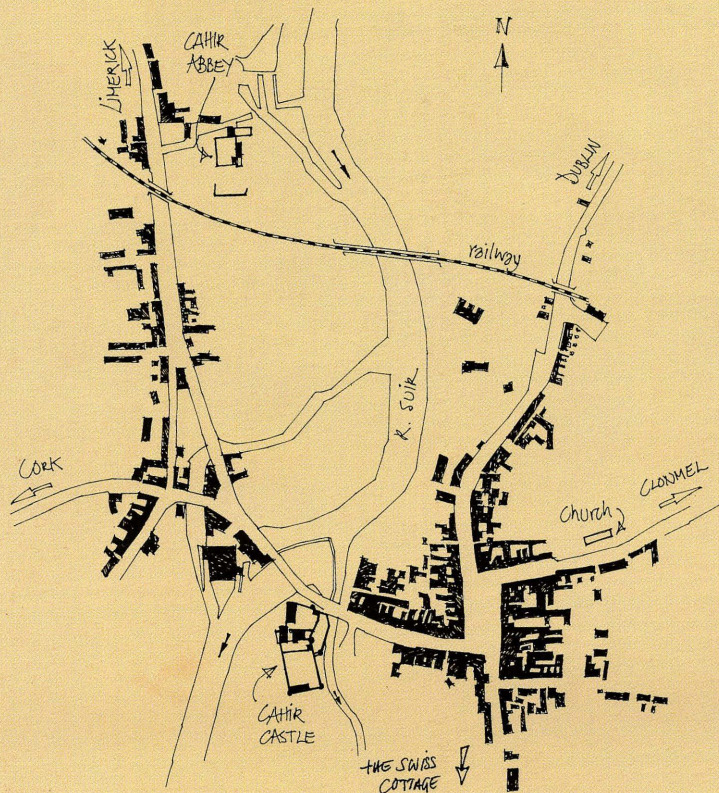
Ground Floor

1. Nave
2. Tower
3. Chancel
4. Southeast Tower
5. Cloister Garth
6. Graveyard



Town plan

0 100m



Cahir Castle

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